DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 541 EA 021 270

AUTHOR Oches, Barry
TITLE Teacher Assistance Teams: A Process for Democratic Teachers.
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Institute for Democracy in Education (Athens, OH, June 22-24, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Improvement; Special Education; Special Education Teachers; *Special Programs; *Teacher Aides; *Teaching Methods; *Team Training
IDENTIFIERS *Teacher Assistance Teams

ABSTRACT

The Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) process has come about as a result of the increase in referrals for special education services (mostly for the learning disabilities classroom). TAT was devised to break the cycle of student failure. This paper has five parts. Part 1 briefly elaborates on the definition of a TAT. Part 2 addresses the need for TAT in terms of student-related and system-related problems. Part 3 outlines the 14 sequential steps of the TAT process. The necessry planning and implementation procedures of TAT are provided in part 4 and part 5 lists seven factors that influence the success of the program. (SI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED310541

TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS: A PROCESS FOR DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS

Presented at:

The Second Annual

INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION

Conference

June 22-24, 1989

Ohio University, Athens, Ohio

Presented by:

Barry Oches

Special Education Teacher

Amesville Elementary School

Amesville, Ohio 45711

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Barry J. Oches

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 021 270

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS: A PROCESS FOR DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION:

There are several names by which the Teacher Assistance Team is known. This is a building-level concept therefore each group can name it whatever they feel best describes what they want the group to do. Some common names are: Intervention Assistance Team, Building Level Assistance Team, Staff Support Team, and Instructional Support Team.

The Teacher Assistance Team process has come about from the increase in referrals for special education services, mostly for the learning disabilities classroom. The increase is problematic because there is still no good definition of what a learning disability really is, and the funding for new units in schools has been cut dramatically. The Teacher Assistance Team has been devised as a way to intervene to break the cycle of student failure. The cycle typically starts with the student failing to achieve for some reason. The student's teacher moves the class on to the next skill in the curricular sequence even though the student has not learned a prerequisite skill. This causes the student to fail at the next skill, thus falling farther behind. This repeats itself until the student is so far behind he/she is referred as being handicapped in some way. Generally speaking, the teacher is not at fault because it is impossible to individualize for 25 or so students and still cover a year's worth of material.

The Teacher Assistance Team is a process rather than a method or an innovation. It is not something that can be packaged and sold.

Either the leadership exists to make it work or it doesn't. If a school does it because it is the latest idea in the literature or the state department of education has mandated it, it will become just another one of those fads that continually pass through education.

PART 1. WHAT IS A TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAM?

Just by it's name, one can tell that it will be a group of people who help teachers. The people who make up the group are teachers and support personnel selected from the building staff. The size of the group can vary according to what works best for that particular school. Being on the team is generally an extra duty to be done outside of the school day for no pay.

PART 2. WHAT IS THE NEED FOR A TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAM?

The need arises out of the acknowledgement that there are problems which exist in today's schools. The Teacher Assistance Team is a process to find the solutions to the problems.

Typical student related problems addressed by a Teacher Assistance Team

A. behavior problem in class

B. behavior problem in school, outside of class

C. lack of motivation

D. student with ability does not achieve as expected

E. student with low-average ability does not achieve

F. low self-esteem

G. standardized test scores do not reflect ability

The Teacher Assistance Team can also become an intervention in an established system that does not work efficiently. In this way it can be a solution to many problems itself.

Typical system related problems addressed by the Teacher Assistance Team

A. isolation of teachers

B. "experts" don't have the answers to specific problems

C. inservice training is deficient

D. continuing education is removed from school setting

E. student problems are becoming very complex

F. possibilities for communication within the school systems are few

PART 3. HOW DOES THE TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAM WORK?

Like most processes, Teacher Assistance Team is a series of sequential steps. To maximize effectiveness, it is best if the steps are followed from start to finish for every task.

Steps to the Teacher Assistance Team process

1. a teacher identifies a student's need and questions how to meet that need.

2. the teacher fills out a referral form with pertinent information including a description of the student's

specific problem and gives it to the Teacher Assistance Team chairperson.

3. the Teacher Assistance Team chairperson distributes copies of the form to the team members with an agenda for the next meeting.
4. prior to the meeting, each team member writes down possible solutions to the problem.
5. at the meeting, the teacher briefly describes the problem (5 minutes).
6. the team members ask questions (5 minutes).
7. the team members individually present their written ideas.
8. the team brainstorms any new ideas or combinations of ideas.
9. the referring teacher is asked to select the best idea(s).
10. a plan of action is written using the selected idea(s).
11. a team member is assigned to regular follow-up with the teacher.
12. a follow-up meeting date with the team is set.
13. at the follow-up meeting the referring teacher describes how the plan has worked. These are noted for future reference either for other similar students or for this student's future teachers.
14. at this step it is decided whether to accept the suc-

cess of the plan, to try a different plan (starting over at step #8), or to refer to the special ed committee for testing.

PART 4. HOW IS A TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAM STARTED?

How the team is started is critical to the success of the team. Many worthwhile ideas have died in action because they were forced on staff who did not want them. On the other hand, we in education are used to new ideas coming through all the time but we are not used to sticking to any one thing for very long. It often takes more skill to keep the Teacher Assistance Team operating year after year than it does to start it.

The first step is for some person to like the concept of the team enough to commit to starting the idea circulating among the appropriate people. Usually the idea comes down from the curriculum coordinator or other central office administrator or from a principal just back from an inservice. There is no reason that it could not come from a teacher or parent. It might even work better if it did. The team being described here is strictly building level. A school district may wish to coordinate the teams, but each one operates independently.

The next step is to introduce the idea and a plan for implementing it to the building staff. There may exist a school staff that could successfully run a team without the involvement or support of the principal, but it is generally felt that the support of the principal is critical. Leadership is a very important issue in this

process. Creative problem solving cannot be forced or mandated. People need to feel an ownership of the idea and that they are respected as persons and professionals within the process. The chairperson of the team is often the principal but it does not have to be.

The information that needs to be presented to the staff includes:

Information to be presented to staff

A. What the Teacher Assistance Team is.

B. What problems the Teacher Assistance Team hopes to address.

C. How the Teacher Assistance Team process works.

D. How often the Teacher Assistance Team will meet and for how long.

E. Expressed need for volunteers to be on the Teacher Assistance Team.

After some time is given to the staff to think about the idea and a list of volunteers is compiled, the chairperson and the principal discuss the selection of the team members. Criteria for selection should be:

Teachers selected should represent:

A. the range of grade levels or subject areas within the building

B. a variety of teaching styles.

C. a willingness to work together and share ideas.

D. a willingness to devote extra time and effort

E. a range of experience

The first meeting of the newly selected team should be for planning and not have referrals to deal with at that time. The team members may need to be introduced to the underlying concept of the team that is different from the average committee with which most people are familiar. This initial meeting is intended to open communication between members and serve as an example for future meetings.

Agenda for the first Teacher Assistance Team meeting

A. how teams are built and operate.

B. how the team plans to interact with the rest of the staff.

C. what is the role and responsibility of each team member.

D. what information should be on the referral form (the chairperson could provide a selection of possible forms and the team could choose one rather than create one from scratch at the meeting).

E. listing available resources.

F. set team goals.

G. set the meeting frequency, time and location

The team, and what it intends to accomplish then needs to be presented to the rest of the staff. At this point the Teacher Assistance Team is ready for referrals and to operate.

PART 5: MAKING THE TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAM EFFECTIVE

It was stated earlier that starting a Teacher Assistance Team is easier than keeping it going. This is due to several factors that are unpredictable at the beginning. Success really depends on how well the leader of the team handles these factors.

Factors influencing success of the Teacher Assistance Team

A. value of team to the staff

B. ability of chairperson to lead

C. communication among the team and to staff

D. organization of process

E. support of principal

F. atmosphere of the staff; how they get along together

G. ability of the team to be flexible to adjust to the needs of the building staff

CONCLUSION

The Teacher Assistance Team is a process which attempts to overcome the self-imposed barriers of isolation and top-down bureaucratic flow of power within school systems today. It realizes that schools are staffed with competent, creative people who can indeed solve some difficult problems if given a chance. The most important

motivation for these teams is acknowledging that there are many students in school today who are not getting the help they need. All education professionals would like to be able to say that they only focus on the needs of each of their students, but that is an impossibility. The Teacher Assistance Team provides help for those students whom teachers have previously been too frustrated or overworked to help.